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ABSTRACT

In implementing a districtwide reading project emphasizing staff development for middle school level teachers, the Moore County, North Carolina district conducted a study to determine whether middle school children could exceed their prior reading growth rates over a three-year period. Students from grades four through eight were pretested in the fall of each year using upper levels of the Prescriptive Reading Inventory and its companion test, the ORBIT, the California Reading Test, and the Piers-Harris Self Concept Scale. The information these tests provided on student strengths, weaknesses, and attitudes became the basis for instructional planning. Among the conditions the study sought to promote were individualized instruction, student motivation, and teacher participation in program design. Teacher inservice training was provided by a specialist in diagnostic prescriptive development of reading. Students' reading rate was determined to be the average of the latest three year gains given in grade level equivalents, and the students' progress for each of the study years was compared to this rate. The results indicated remarkable success in almost every test objective for all three years. Direct training in diagnosis, program design, selection and construction of activities and materials, and administrative support were essential for building the teacher confidence and competence that precipitated students' success. (HTH)

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Helping Students Develop Reading Ability Commensurate with Their Potential

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School systems conscientiously try to achieve maximum results for each tax dollar spent. The teaching staffs of such systems are quick to recognize when students are not reaching their full potential and voice concern. This awareness expressed by a system's administrative and instructional staff may, however, not be enough to bring about maximum realization of student potential. What, then, is needed to help such systems move themselves forward? How can good teachers become more effective than they presently are? How can students be helped to achieve at a level more in keeping with their true potential for growth?

The answer, of course, lies in the ability of the instructional staff to stimulate and guide students toward a greater depth of learning. The challenge is to strengthen an already strong experienced staff. In the state of North Carolina, major changes faced classroom teachers, a changed student body, state sanction for the aids and parents in the instructional program, and use of criterion-reference testing for matching student with appropriate instruction, all have produced changes that affected even the most experienced teacher's approach.

After a thorough review of the system's overall program, Moore County found that secondary and primary programs had received the most assistance from the system's and state monies. The reading-language development of middle grade students was of primary concern. Emphasis would be placed upon staff development for teachers of the middle levels.

The basic design of the Moore County project was as follows:

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Study Population

Students from a total of twelve selected classes, three from each of grades five, six, seven, and eight, at the Aberdeen and Southern Pines Middle Schools of Moore County, North Carolina, served as subjects for the Pilot study, 1977-78. These same level classes plus three from grade four comprised the study populations for the 1978-79 and 1979-80 studies. Two new schools, the West End Middle and Pinehurst Middle School, joined the program in the 1978-79 year and remained through the end of the study. One class from each of grades four through eight in each new school joined in the study. The criteria for selection of schools was that the school and individual classes have a high percentage of reading disability as well as permit a wide coverage of grades and that the study would have full acceptance by the school's administration, faculty, and parents. All classes within each grade were heterogeneously grouped. Only the scores of students who remain in the consecutive programs were analyzed. Two major socio-economic levels were identified within the population, 1) rural tenant farmers' children and, 2) the affluent children of Southern Pines and Pinehurst, golfing resort towns. The ratio of black to white children participating in the study was proportional to that of general population of Moore County. Tobacco farming and golfing were the major sources of income for the children's parents.

Research Design and Procedures

This study which sought to determine whether middle-school children could exceed their prior growth rates extended over a three year period, 1977-78, 1978-79, 1979-80. In the fall of each year all students were pre-tested using the uppper levels of the Prescriptive Reading Inventory and its companion test, the ORBIT, for middle and upper level students, the California

Reading Test, and the Piers-Harris Self Concept Scale. These tests determined student strengths, weaknesses and attitudes which were used as the bases for instructional planning. In the spring of each year when instruction had been completed, the students were post tested using alternate forms of these tests. Questionnaires were completed by the students to assess their opinions of growth made during diagnostic-prescriptive instruction and to help given by volunteers.

The conditions which the study sought to promote were, 1) provision of individual help and attention for each student, 2) providion of time and motivation to assure that each student practiced the skills taught, 3) provision for the classroom teacher to participate fully in the design of diagnostic-prescriptive program for teaching reading in the middle schools, 4) provision for the classroom teacher to develop new and varied techniques for instructing and interacting with children, and 5) provision of a great variety of materials both commercial and "teacher-made."

To insure that bonafide diagnostic-prescriptive instruction would be given, inservice training was provided by a specialist in diagnostic-prescriptive development of reading before inception of the study. "On-site" visitation for planning, development, and workshops continued throughout the first year or pilot study. The same training sequence was used the second year, 1978-79. "On-site" consultations between specialist and classroom teacher determined effective use of procedures and materials developed during training. Monitoring of student growth throughout the three year study was accomplished by a series of six week evaluations. The progress for each child was planned, developed, and evaluated after six weeks. In November, March, and June of each year, the principal and teacher discussed each

individual student's growth. A conference was then held with the parents. Thus responsibility for student growth was shared by those most concerned for his development.

Data Analysis Procedures

Student progress throughout the three year study was determined by the percentage of gain the student made over and above what he normally would have achieved. A study of each student's prior rate of growth was made by consulting his permanent record. Previous standardized achievement test scores were examined. The student's growth rate was determined to be the average of the latest three year gains given in grade level equivalents. The student's progress for each of the three years of the study were compared to this rate. Growth was said to have occurred if the student progressed one and one-half times his previous rate. Significance was set at the .05 level. Fisher's T-test was used for the analysis of achievement scores for students of the Pilot Study. However, for the last two years the T-test for dependent samples was applied as students were exposed to repeated measures employing the same testing instruments.

Findings and Conclusions

Tables I, II, III, IV, V, and VI list the progress rates of Moore County middle school students who participated in the three year experimental study designed to identify the base for development of a model middle school reading program.

Table I 1977-1978

Iowa Test of Basic Skills		
Grade Level	Total Percent Achieving Objective	Significant for Study
Grade 8	31%	yes
Grade 7	44%	yes
Grade 6	39%	yes
Grade 5	35%	yes
	Total: 37% (Reached Objective)	yes

TABLE II 1977-1978

Piers-Harris		
Grade Level	Total Percent Achieving Objective	Significant for Study
Grade 8	52%	yes
Grade 7	50%	yes
Grade 6	59%	yes
Grade 5	35%	no
	Total: 51% (Reached Objective)	

TABLE III 1978-1979

Iowa Test of Basic Skills		
Grade Level	Total Percent Achieving Objective	Significant for Study
Grade 8	45%	no
Grade 7	61%	yes
Grade 6	66%	yes
Grade 5	68%	yes
	Total: 57% (Reached Objective)	yes

TABLE IV 1978-1979

Piers-Harris		
Grade Level	Total Percent Achieving Objective	Significant for Study
Grade 8	55%	yes
Grade 7	63%	yes
Grade 6	48%	no
Grade 5	29%	no
	Total: 49% (Reached Objective)	yes

TABLE V 1979-1980

Iowa Test of Basic Skills		
Grade Level	Total Percent Achieving Objective	Significant for Study
Grade 8	50%	yes
Grade 7	58%	yes
Grade 6	68%	yes
Grade 5	85%	yes
Grade 4	69%	yes
	Total: 59%	

TABLE VI 1979-1980

Piers-Harris		
Grade Level	Total Percent Achieving Objective	Significant for Study
Grade 8	43%	yes
Grade 7	54%	yes
Grade 6	42%	no
Grade 5	51%	yes
Grade 4	43%	no
	Total: 47%	

The willingness and commitment of the staff to reorganize the manner in which their instruction was designed and implemented was the essential ingredient in Moore County's success. Expectation that students of all ability levels could show a higher growth rate than was previously anticipated, confidence in their ability to organize and implement an instructional program that would bring about such growth, and use of interaction techniques that convince individual students that they could learn effectively, all were critical elements in the teachers' reorientation.

The principals' knowledge of diagnostic-prescriptive instruction and its implementation was also necessary. They, too, received training as the teachers received their reorientation instruction. Such training was essential since the principal's overt support and guidance were critical for providing the security necessary when new or different forms of instruction were being put into effect in the classroom. Such administrative support was offered freely throughout Moore County's three year study.

Direct training in diagnosis, program design, selection and construction of activities and materials, and use of parents, aides, or other volunteers was essential for building teacher confidence and competence. The basic orientation and strategy training was provided by the author. Various other consultants offered highly specialized training. All consultants demonstrated use of humanistic approaches for implementing strategies being demonstrated. The entire teaching staff learned the Madeline Hunter approach for interaction with students. The Hunter team provided "on-site" follow through. The general supervisor for Moore County visited each classroom frequently to provide guidance for using both the interaction strategies and instructional procedures. The reading specialist was also on call for guiding the teachers as they implemented the different approaches. Such "on-site" support was an essential element in Moore County's success.

Strong teachers who are knowledgable of good diagnostic and instructional procedures will respond with an even greater effort if provided the support that helps them confront the unusual, new, or difficult that changing conditions demand.

The type of reorientation offered Moore County's teachers requires money and released time. However, it is important to note that the supervisory staff of local school systems possess the expertise to provide diagnostic and instructional assistance. Staff psychologists and guidance counselors are very knowledgable of interaction techniques and could easily supply such training.

The reorientation should begin during the opening days before the students arrive thus providing an uninterrupted look at what can be accomplished and for use of diagnostic data in program design. Additional training can be offered at regular intervals and is best accomplished during the regular school day. Trained volunteers or aides may successfully be used at such times if substitutes cannot be afforded.

The Moore County experiment demonstrated that an instructional staff can and will welcome direct assistance in coping with a difficult problem such as motivating students of all levels to achieve within the range of their potential for growth rather than simply moving from one grade to the next in the usual fashion. Lack of funds is a perennial problem for all systems. However, this can be circumvented if the expertise which is already available within the local system is tapped.